

The Economic Conditions in West Africa, Lessons for East Africa

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A brief by Ezekiel Manyara

Background, Mission and Objectives of Forum Organizers

African Research and Resource Forum (ARRF) founded in 2002 as a limited company by guarantee, is a non-partisan, non-governmental, non-profit, independent international forum for scholars that are devoted to the promotion and conduct of research into problems hindering development of African economies. The main objectives of the ARRF include:

- Conducting research on political, economic, social, cultural and environmental issues in Africa
- Assembling and making available relevant information and best practices on development matters pertinent to Africa
- Creating a resource centre that will conserve the African indigenous knowledge
- Serving as a reflection and discourse forum on policies critical to Africa's growth

The Forum: Economic Conditions in West Africa- Lessons for East Africa

In collaboration with the Heinrich Boll Foundation (HBF), ARRF organised the forum on "Economic Conditions in West Africa -Lessons for East Africa" with the following objectives:

- Draw a general economic comparison between West and East Africa
- Assess past economic conditions of West Africa and predict their influence to the future performance of these economies
- Discuss pertinent lessons that East African economies can learn from the economic performance of West African countries

Proceedings

The Forum was opened with remarks from one of the directors of ARRF and this was followed by a keynote presentation by the Executive Director Africa Vision based in Abuja, Nigeria. The major characteristics of Western Africa highlighted in his presentation included the changing demographic dynamics and focus on key major production sectors namely agriculture, industry and service. This was followed by a presentation on the economic policy challenges facing East Africa by the Economic Advisor on International Affairs in the Ministry of Planning and National Development in Kenya.

A plenary session that followed the two presentations, raised the following issues that could be broadly categorized as follows:

- Macro Economic issues: Unemployment, high interest rates compared to transparency and democratic governance

- Security and ethnic issues
- Adopting educational systems and technology that are suited to Africans and inability to transform such knowledge to suit local economies in order to propel development
- The overwhelming external influence that prevails in both regions
- The paradox of huge natural resource endowment with high poverty levels and a huge public debt in both East and West Africa

Recommendations

- Insistence on transparent and good governance right from the grass root levels of government machinery
- Emphasis on equitable resource distribution as one way of curbing unemployment
- Emphasis on consumption of locally produced goods to promote and protect domestic industries
- Proper macro economic management of locally available resources in order to solve the paradox of large resource endowment versus high poverty levels
- Devolution of power accompanied by civic education to achieve transparent democracy and equity in power sharing
- Innovative adoption of technology to suit the domestic economy and conditions (land, labour and capital)
- Urgency in developing relevant educational system that can solve pertinent pressing development issues in Africa
- Inclusion of Youth Policy in the development plans as the youth constitute over 75% of the population in both regions
- Strengthen inter-ethnic social relations as a way of curbing ethnic conflicts

For more information on the African Research and Resource Forum Public Lecture Series-2004, please contact:

African Research and Resource Forum
 Hse No. 305 Mountain View Estate, off Waiyaki Way
 P.O. Box 57153 Nairobi Kenya
 Tel: 630457/630095
 Fax: 630457
 Email: pan@africaonline.co.ke